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Following last week's recall of nearly a million lead-contaminated Big Bird and Elmo toys imported from China, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, has introduced legislation calling for a 100-fold increase in penalties for unsafe food and toys.

The bill would also provide funding for additional safety inspections.

"Congress must do all it can to protect American families from dangerous toys and food produced in China," Kirk said at a press conference Tuesday. "My legislation will send a very clear message to anyone who imports tainted goods that threaten the safety of our kids -- violators will pay dearly and more inspectors are on the way. Poisonous toys are unacceptable."

Before the August recess, Kirk introduced H.R. 3100, the bipartisan Import Safety Act of 2007, to increase penalties levied against importers of contaminated goods by 100-fold.

Food and toy violations resulting in death would trigger fines increased from \$500,000 to \$50 million. The legislation also provides an additional \$20 million to the Consumer Product Safety Commission for overseas inspections and \$20 million to the Federal Drug Administration for overseas inspections of processed food and toothpaste.

Kirk, the co-chair of the bipartisan U.S.- China Working Group in the House, also introduced the U.S. China Diplomatic Expansion Act of 2007. The legislation would authorize the establishment of 10 new American "presence posts" in China that could house inspection officials and also boosts funding to initiatives that could work with manufacturers on these problems.

Kirk also said that last month, about 40 tubes of "potentially toxic" toothpaste fraudulently labeled Colgate "Triple Action" were pulled from the shelf of a discount store in Arlington Heights.

"There's no question we need to do a better job of testing imports before they ever reach store shelves in America," Kirk said. "Congress needs to provide additional inspection funds to the FDA and the Consumer Product Safety Commission to effectively protect American families."